

Recommendations

What the Survey Tells Us

The participation rate in the survey was 62 percent, which is extremely high. The good turnout results from the willingness of communities to take part in the survey and from the dedication of Main Street staff to follow up with phone calls to participants.

Of the 165 communities in the target population, responses were received from 102. Forty of those communities are considered active Main Street members. The difference between active and inactive members explains what might otherwise seem like contradictory answers. In some cases, respondents asked for Main Street to create services that it already offers.

For example, 84 percent of the people said on-site technical assistance from Main Street would be the most convenient way to deliver services. The organization does offer that service; however, 61 percent of the respondents have not used it. One possible reason for this discrepancy is that less active members are not aware that the service is available.

In another instance, only 11 percent said statewide meetings were useful for in-depth training, but 62 percent of those who attended the conferences said they were helpful. Obviously, respondents feel that conferences offer more than just opportunities for training.

The survey recorded a general optimism from respondents about their downtown's future. Most said their areas are more vital now than they were 10 years ago.

The survey clearly shows that people need help in recruiting new businesses and in retaining existing ones. On the other hand, their answers illustrated

Top Training Needs By DOC Region

Full rankings located in Appendix A
DOC Map in Appendix B

Region One

(Lake, Porter, Jasper, Newton)

1. Indiana resources for downtown development
2. Creating an image for downtown
3. Community-driven real estate development
4. Small business retention and expansion
5. New business attraction and development
6. Parking, INDOT, and other transportation issues

Region Two

(LaPorte, St. Joseph, Elkhart,
LaGrange, Starke, Marshall,
Kosciusko, Pulaski, Fulton)

1. Creating an image for downtown
2. New business attraction and development
3. Small business retention and expansion
4. Basics for downtown promotion
5. Maintaining and rehabilitating buildings
6. Streetscapes, signage, & other public improvements
7. Parking, INDOT, & other transportation issues

Region Three

(Steuben, Noble, DeKalb, Whitley,
Allen, Huntington, Wells, Adams)

1. Creating an image for downtown
2. Creating effective special events
3. Step-by-step market analysis

Recommendations

that many communities have not taken the basic steps needed to tackle those topics.

For instance, it is vital that a community understand the composition of its current retail mix before launching a recruitment campaign, but few people were interested in training on how to use market analysis in downtown development. In another example, only 18 percent said they have a strong comprehensive work plan for downtown.

These incongruities underline the need for education on the fundamentals of downtown revitalization. In other words, there seems to be more emphasis on the need for results—such as a new store setting up downtown—than on the work that will get them there: a strategic plan, board training, marketing data, etc.

The survey also shows that some possible downtown advocates are being underutilized. Few people said that community foundations or downtown residents were much of a presence in revitalization efforts, but—once harnessed—both of these groups can be key players.

Regarding Main Street's services, help from staff with inquiries received the highest marks from respondents. This response could indicate an area to direct more resources in the future. The least helpful feature was the library, but that is because it was also the least used. Consequently, Main Street should consider options to either promote library services or direct fewer resources toward them.

The database used to calculate results allows for examination of how responses differed among the 12 regions of the state, as recently defined by the Indiana Department of Commerce.

Top Training Needs By DOC Region (Continued)

4. Small business retention and expansion
5. New business attraction and development
6. Maintaining and rehabilitating buildings
7. Parking, INDOT, & other transportation issues

Region Four

(Cass, Miami, Wabash, Howard, Grant, Tipton)

1. Recruiting, using, and keeping volunteers
2. Step-by-step market analysis
3. Building support for downtown development
4. New business attraction and development

Region Five

(Benton, White, Carroll, Warren, Tippecanoe, Clinton)

1. New business attraction and development
2. Building support for downtown development
3. Creating an image for downtown
4. Strategies for tech-based economic development
5. Maintaining and rehabilitating buildings
6. Design incentives and regulations
7. Streetscapes, signage, & other public improvements

Region Six

(Vermillion, Fountain, Montgomery, Parke, Putnam, Vigo, Clay, Sullivan)

1. Small business retention and expansion

Recommendations

A typical example of how communities differ involves the question about what type of training is needed in the next 12 months. For instance, about 17 percent of responses from the far southwest corner of the state requested help in strategic planning. Fewer than eight percent of the people from other districts were interested in such help.

Program Recommendations

Indiana Main Street has an opportunity to position itself as the premier resource for downtown revitalization in the state and thereby fulfill its mission of encouraging and assisting Indiana communities to build and sustain vital downtowns.

At their March 2002 retreat, the Indiana Main Street Council identified 11 goals for the upcoming year. These goals expressed the Council's desire that the Indiana Main Street program serve as an effective resource for Main Street communities.

These goals are in direct response to the perceived weaknesses of the state program: little visibility, little value to communities, and ineffective service delivery models for technical assistance.

SDG believes that the survey results reveal the opportunity that Indiana Main Street has to create an effective program that provides timely, relevant, and valuable information to communities.

Specifically, we believe that Indiana Main Street should position itself as the primary provider of downtown-relevant information for Indiana communities.

Top Training Needs By DOC Region (Continued)

2. Maintaining and rehabilitating buildings
3. Streetscapes, signage, & other public improvements

Region Seven

(Boone, Hamilton, Madison, Hendricks, Marion, Hancock, Morgan, Johnson, Shelby)

1. Advanced fundraising (special districts, taxes, and endowments)
2. Using the Main Street approach to downtown development
3. Creating an image for downtown
4. Small business retention and expansion
5. Maintaining and rehabilitating buildings
6. Parking, INDOT, and other transportation issues

Region Eight

(Blackford, Jay, Delaware, Randolph, Henry, Wayne)

1. New business attraction and expansion
2. Options for second story redevelopment
3. Community-driven real estate development

Region Nine

(Rush, Fayette, Union, Franklin, Ripley, Dearborn, Ohio, Jefferson, Switzerland)

1. Options for 2nd story redevelopment
2. Designing effective retail promotions
3. Basic fundraising--dues, sponsorships, & special events

Recommendations

No other state agency or organization is focused primarily on the health and vitality of Indiana's downtowns. Indiana Main Street is.

No other economic development model has a proven track record of sparking public and private reinvestment in downtowns--to the tune of \$16 billion since 1980. The Main Street approach does.

To effectively capitalize on these facts, SDG recommends that the Indiana Main Street program consider the following recommendations:

Develop a series of training programs tailored to the needs expressed in each DOC region.

Hold these workshops at key locations around the state. These workshops could be a mixture of free and fee-based programs depending upon the complexity of the topic. Use state staff, staff from the National Main Street Center, and other state partners as appropriate.

Add more content to the Main Street newsletter. Many communities indicated that receiving training information in print is an effective way to reach them. Indiana Main Street staff should consider reformatting the newsletter to add even more educational content.

Increase the use of electronic communication. Many communities feel that increasing the content on the Indiana Main Street website and creating a listserve or bulletin board would be good ways to share information concerning downtown revitalization. Indiana Main Street should explore these electronic options for communication, similar to the work being done by the National Main Street Center in this regard.

Top Training Needs By DOC Region (Continued)

Region Ten

(Owen, Monroe, Brown, Bartholomew, Decatur, Greene, Lawrence, Jackson, Jennings)

1. Basics for downtown promotion
2. Maintaining & rehabilitating buildings
3. Building support for downtown development
4. Basic fundraising (dues, sponsorships, & special events)
5. Strategic planning for downtown development
6. Strategies for tech-based economic development
7. Small business retention and expansion
8. Streetscapes, signage, & other public improvements.

Region Eleven

(Knox, Daviess, Martin, Gibson, Pike, Dubois, Posey, Vanderburgh, Warrick, Spencer, Perry)

1. Strategic planning for downtown development
2. New business attraction and development
3. Maintaining and rehabilitating buildings
4. Community-driven real estate development

Region Twelve

(Orange, Washington, Scott, Crawford, Harrison, Floyd, Clark)

1. Basic fundraising--dues, sponsorships, & special events
2. Options for second story redevelopment
3. Small business retention and expansion

Recommendations

Assist communities in understanding the strategic planning and market analysis process and their effective use in developing revitalization strategies. Business development was the topic most requested by communities, yet most communities haven't completed basic steps to position themselves for business growth. Communities need to hear the message that these steps are essential during training, technical assistance visits, and in newsletters.

Brief DOC regional staff on the Main Street approach and the needs expressed in their region. The DOC reorganization provides the Indiana Main Street program an opportunity to increase its visibility among its peers at DOC. DOC staff need to look to Indiana Main Street as their resource for downtown revitalization information.

Use affiliated organizations and DOC field staff as the first line of on-site technical assistance available to communities. Although survey respondents identified on-site technical assistance as their preferred way to receive help, the Indiana Main Street program's resources are extremely limited. With two staff members, the need far outweighs the capacity. State staff should identify a network of individuals who can provide on-site technical assistance in basic topics. With training, DOC field staff and staff in affiliated groups, such as regional plan commissions or the Historic Landmarks Foundation of Indiana, could be good resources for basic assistance. State staff should be positioned as the second line of on-site technical assistance tailored to Main Street specific topics.

Create and publicize regional Indiana Main Street libraries. Most survey respondents have never used the library resources available to them. State program staff should identify the basic

Top Training Needs By DOC Region (Continued)

4. New business attraction and development
5. Streetscapes, signage, & other public improvements

Relevant Indiana Main Street Program Goals

Taken from notes the from Indiana Main Street Mission and Visioning Meeting held March 15, 2002

Goal Six: Develop a marketing plan for Indiana Main Street to include marketing materials and timelines.

Goal Seven: Identify available funds, as well as programs that can provide funds to Main Street communities and generate an information dissemination vehicle.

Goal Eight: Generate a list of grant, endowment, and public/private foundation monies available to Main Street stakeholders.

Goal Eleven: Identify and implement collaborative efforts between Indiana Main Street and other government agencies.

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publications that communities might use and create “branch libraries” in each DOC region. The central library should continue to be the repository of the expanded collection.

Add a research element to the Indiana Main Street program. Indiana Main Street is uniquely positioned to serve as the place for timely information about the economic development needs of Indiana’s downtowns. As part of DOC, Main Street can link downtowns to broader economic development programs. As the sole agency focused on downtowns, Main Street can legitimately identify, develop, and disseminate information for use by a broad audience.

The state program should develop a research and publication agenda for the upcoming year that focuses on the needs identified from the survey and Indiana Main Street Council retreat. State IMS staff could serve as primary researchers and as research facilitators working in concert with appropriate university and private research efforts.

This recommendation is the most far-reaching one that SDG is making to the Indiana Main Street program, and yet, we believe it is the one that will be the most effective at increasing the visibility and value of the state program. Items for immediate research consideration appear at right.

Annual State of the Downtown Report

As research information is developed, Indiana Main Street can communicate downtown issues to economic development stakeholders in state and local arenas. SDG believes this community relations approach would move the state program into a much more visible position as an economic development resource for local community leaders.

Items for Research and Publication

Status of Indiana Downtowns

Research should identify and document how current economic trends are affecting Indiana downtowns.

Trends on Main Street

Undertake a regular survey of Indiana Main Streets documenting state trends and results, similar in form and function to the National Main Street Trend Survey.

Indiana Resources for Downtown Development

Research to document what is available, similar in format to Ball State’s Toolbox Guide to Development Funds but targeted to downtown revitalization. The guide should contain information about the entire scope of downtown development, including, but not limited to, resources for funding, planning, and how to work with state organizations.

Advanced fundraising

Currently used by only 25% of survey respondents, research should examine what works and what doesn’t and provide recommendations to communities on how to proceed.